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Foreign
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Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy

An Intelligence Assessment

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March 1979

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Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy

Key Judgments

President Mobutu's popularity has slipped badly over the past two years because of numerous and worsening economic and social problems. Food shortages, inflation, deteriorating services, and an ineffective government plague the Zairian population.

Mobutu has improved relations with Zaire's most important neighbors, but mistrust probably remains. Zairian dissidents in Angola and Zambia will pose an even greater threat once the Inter-African Force departs in mid-1979.

Organized opposition to Mobutu inside Zaire is nearly nonexistent. The European-based opposition movements are divided and weak. The chief danger to the Mobutu government would probably come in the form of spontaneous uprisings in such locales as Kinshasa or Shaba Region and/or another invasion by foreign-based dissidents.

The Zairian economy—the main source of Mobutu's difficulties—will remain in deep trouble for the foreseeable future. Mobutu has made some significant economic reforms, but corruption, inflation, and a huge budgetary deficit remain serious problems.

The President has initiated some reforms but will go only so far; he is unlikely to uproot the corruption and ethnic discrimination that has worked so well for him in the past.

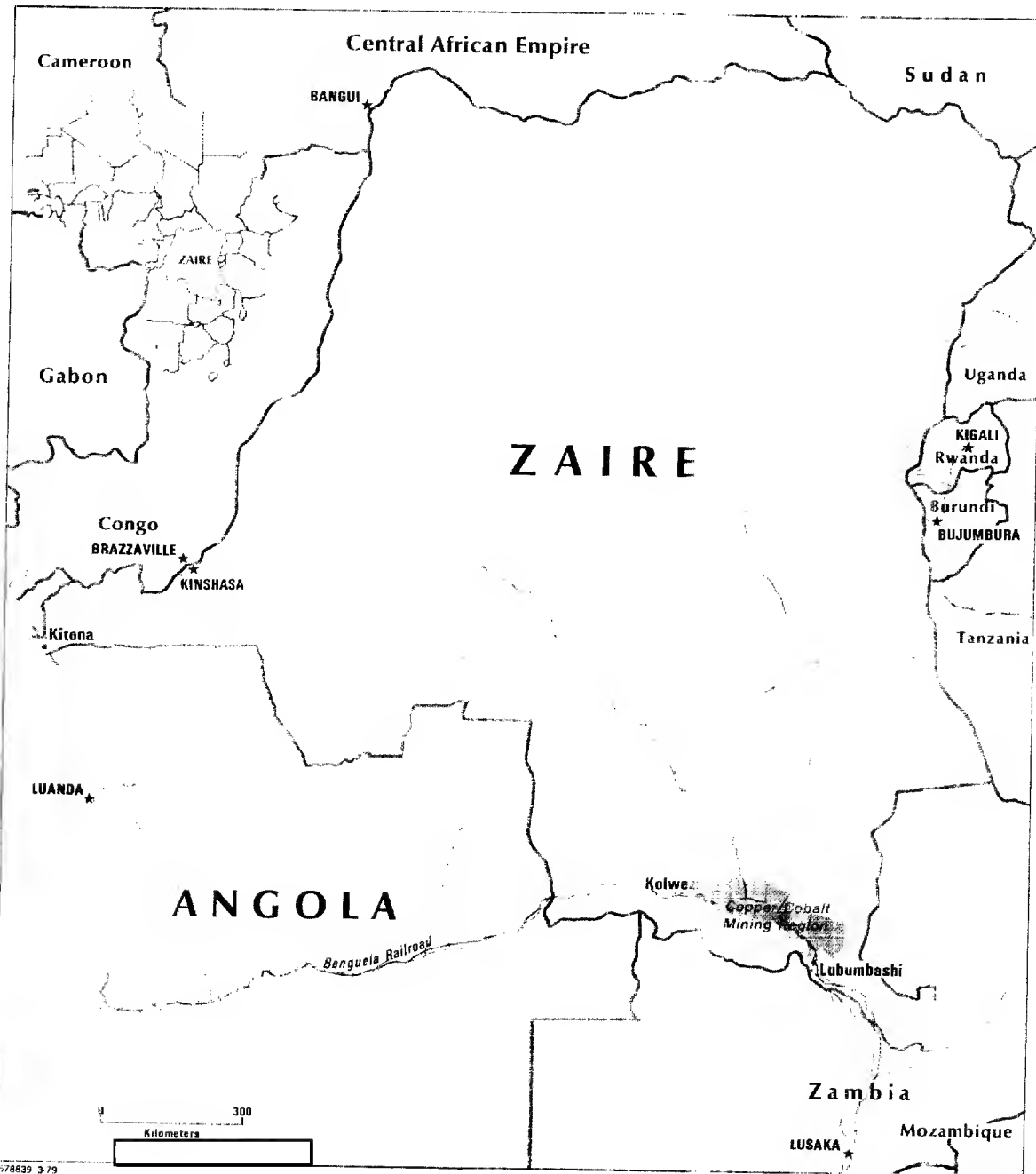
The prospects for stability in Zaire are dim—with or without Mobutu. Without continued external economic and military support, the President's rule would deteriorate even more rapidly.

The problems facing Zairian society also afflict the military. The Army is both the base of Mobutu's rule and his chief potential threat.

If his position continues to weaken, Mobutu is likely to lash out at the United States and other Western supporters; he also is likely to curtail reforms. There are no readily identifiable potential successors to Mobutu, and a change in government in Zaire would probably be accompanied by a period of internal disorder. The succeeding regime, however, would probably continue to look to the country's traditional backers as its primary allies.

Key military leaders apparently are loyal, but the Army is incapable of protecting the country's territorial integrity without the assistance of foreign forces. The Army's loyalty when faced with a serious external threat or large-scale internal disorders would be questionable.

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Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy

One comes across nothing but extreme misery, infamy, and contempt, for there is no observance either of . . . laws or military traditions, but all is besmirched. . . . And so much the more are these vices detestable in those who sit on the judgment seat, prescribing rules for others and expecting from them admiration. . . .

—Machiavelli

Despite the manner in which President Mobutu seized power 14 years ago, his main source of strength over the years has been his claim to legitimacy as the country's true founder. Mobutu's authority has been largely based on his historic role in ending most of Zaire's ethnic and regional strife and bringing about a modicum of unity to the country; his tight rein on the government and creation of Zaire's single party; his personal control of the Army; and his general acceptance throughout most of the country and internationally. Mobutu's position as undisputed leader reached its zenith in the early 1970s but began gradually to slip in 1974-75. This erosion has accelerated over the last two years to the point where he is in danger of losing effective control because of numerous economic, political, and social problems that he appears unable to resolve.¹

While Mobutu is blamed for many of the country's difficulties, he is grudgingly viewed as the only leader capable of holding Zaire together. Many of the country's problems were festering before Mobutu came to power, but he has exploited them to suit his needs and perpetuate his rule instead of seeking to resolve them. Although the Zairian President can be credited with bringing the country out of the morass that characterized the early postindependence years, he has done little to promote economic development and political and social integration. Mobutu's attempts to mold a personality cult and construct even a fragile national unity have foundered. Corruption and ethnicity have been the most salient features of his

¹ This paper complements "Zaire: Healing Shaba's Wounds," (RP 79-10033C, January 1979), an Intelligence Assessment that deals almost exclusively with the threat to Mobutu from Zaire's Shaba Region—the country's most important and most troublesome region.

rule. Now that Zaire has fallen on hard times economically, the years of neglect, rampant corruption, and tribal politics may prove to be the crafty President's undoing.² "Mobutuism"—a term used by the President to describe Zaire's official philosophy—has contributed little to the vast majority of Zaire's 25 million inhabitants.

Social Disintegration And Regional Isolation

Dissatisfaction with Mobutu is growing throughout Zaire, and he apparently is unable to reverse this trend. The downward spiral in the Zairians' quality of life has exacerbated the smoldering ill will toward the central government. The President's inability to deal effectively with the worsening economic problems forms the basis of the popular discontent. Ethnic divisions remain a serious social problem, but because of the severity of the country's economic hardships, class cleavages also are becoming more apparent.

Although the country remains generally calm, the current nationwide crisis represents the nadir of Mobutu's 14-year rule. In the capital and in other regions shortages of basic food staples are common. Even when available, they are extremely expensive. Hunger, malnutrition, and disease are widespread. In Bas Zaire, sometimes referred to as the breadbasket of the country, drought has resulted in serious crop losses. Deliveries of foreign food assistance will temporarily alleviate some of the shortages, at least in Kinshasa, but the basic problem will remain. Rampant inflation coupled with the recent devaluations of the Zairian currency add to the hardship. Expatriate residents in

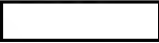
² In some measure, Mobutu is a victim of his own policies. For example, the Zairian Army probably has interpreted the President's discriminatory actions and harsh treatment toward Shaba as giving the Army freedom to commit depredations against Shaban civilians. Even if Mobutu wanted the Army to change its exploitative behavior, as in the case of returning Shaban refugees, he is hard pressed to alter the behavior of his troops in the field. In addition, the fact that the Zairian troops often are neither paid nor fed—largely as a result of government corruption and inefficiency—means that the Army has little choice but to exploit the local population in order to survive.



Mobutu meeting last year with French President Giscard in Paris.




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Zaire and other longtime observers believe that conditions are at an all-time low and are possibly even ripe for revolt. 

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The central government's presence in Zaire's diverse regions, tenuous at best since independence, has deteriorated still further in recent years. Several of Zaire's regions are so physically and psychologically separated from Kinshasa that they are part of the country in name only. Deteriorating roads, shortages of fuel, and limited contact with the capital contribute to the general isolation and social malaise. Kivu has been particularly hard hit. Roads between eastern and western Kivu have been impassable for years. In addition, all available food is flown to the capital from Kivu and other outlying regions. Instead of looking to Kinshasa and the central government for assistance

and relief, the capital is regarded as an exploiter, and inhabitants of Kivu and other rural areas see Kinshasa as largely responsible for their problems. The US Consul in Kivu reports that in some rural areas the money economy has disappeared and the population has reverted to a precolonial lifestyle. 

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Zaire's local and regional governments are largely ineffective. Mobutu's promise in July 1977 to decentralize the government and grant significant powers to regional governors and regional economic commissions has brought little real change. Many regional officials are corrupt and incompetent and often are outsiders who may neither speak the local language nor have an interest in local problems. Personal and tribal connections prevail over competence and professionalism. Indicative of Mobutu's lack of concern with regional

problems—his home region of Equateur excepted—is the fact that the President's visit to Kivu last October was his first in nearly two years. Several Zairian regions continue to suffer because of Mobutu's discriminatory practices. []

The government's highly touted "Mobutu Plan"—an economic recovery scheme announced in 1977—has thus far had little impact. Despite Mobutu's exhortations against corruption, military indiscipline, and economic exploitation, these problems remain. Should the Mobutu Plan finally get off the ground, Kinshasa's traditional neglect of the interior will probably continue. Even with increases in foreign assistance and rising prices for Zairian mineral exports, it is unlikely that Mobutu will expand his priorities to include significantly increased expenditures for the interior. []

Internal Tensions

While the pervasive erosion of economic and social conditions throughout Zaire has led to widespread grumbling, discontent within the country is largely unfocused. Anti-Mobutu dissident activity is unorganized and based mainly in Europe. The population remains docile, more demoralized than rebellious. In a few areas of the country—particularly Mobutu's home region of Equateur—the population may even be reasonably content. The fact that most Zairians do not expect much from Kinshasa probably works in Mobutu's favor. []

Nevertheless, Kinshasa, with its 2.5 million inhabitants, and Shaba, because of its separatist tradition, are potential flash points from which a local disturbance could spread and pose a serious threat to Mobutu. Upheavals in Shaba would also be significant because the region's mineral wealth is an important national resource. Mobutu is aware that the level of popular discontent in both areas is high, and he will move quickly to stamp out any unrest that could be contagious. His haste last month to meet with demonstrating university students protesting poor living conditions at the national university in Kinshasa is an indication of the President's concern that public displays of unrest not get out of hand. The disturbances in Kinshasa also spread to the Lubumbashi campus,

where the authorities moved quickly to respond to students' grievances. Mobutu's awareness of the public mood is also reflected in his decision last month not to allow the Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR), Zaire's sole political party, to deduct party dues from worker salaries. In Shaba, the presence of the Inter-African Force works in Mobutu's favor, but if the force leaves as scheduled in midyear, his control of this economically vital area may again be severely tested. []

Tensions in Kinshasa, Shaba, and Kivu Regions have also been heightened because of renewed cross-border threats from dissidents and from anti-Mobutu insurgents led by European mercenaries. []

Political Reforms Unlikely

Basically, "Mobutuism" is a classic example of political, social, and economic exploitation. The President's authoritarian philosophy of *l'etat c'est moi* has resulted in his ruling the country through a pervasive system of patronage, graft and corruption, and rewards and punishments. Indeed, much of the President's power and the allegiance given to him are direct results of his personal control of rewards and patronage. In times of prosperity—when resources were plentiful—the system probably worked well enough to satisfy the most important individuals and groups in the country. In times of protracted economic hardship and shrinking resources, however, the strains created by this system are such that many Zairians are hard pressed to survive. Mobutu will continue to pay lipservice to stamping out corruption and will periodically purge corrupt individuals, such as the State Commissioner for Agriculture who was fired last December. The President knows, however, that limiting the opportunities for corruption by relatives, cronies, and other influential military and civilian supporters, will lessen their loyalty to him. []



Building the personality cult in Lubumbashi.

The Military: Reflections Of the General Malaise

Although Mobutu's loss of prestige and influence is in part related to Zaire's chronic economic difficulties, another major factor is the inability of his ragtag army to protect the country's territorial integrity and maintain effective internal security. The Zairian Army (FAZ) is more a menace to the country's civilian population than a threat to any outside force. [REDACTED]

In effect, the Zairian Government is a military regime with a civilian facade. Mobutu came to power as an army leader, and as the Supreme Commander of the Zairian armed forces he remains the ranking military figure in the country. He occasionally appears in military dress, and in times of crisis such as the Shaba

invasions he visits his troops in the battle zone in combat uniform. The Army is both the basis of Mobutu's power and the chief threat to his rule. [REDACTED]

Ethnic and regional awareness and the resultant tensions are at least as prevalent in the Zairian military as they are in society at large. Most members of the FAZ, like their civilian counterparts, tend to think of themselves in tribal, rather than national terms. The FAZ, like Zairian society, has failed to achieve social integration. [REDACTED]

The FAZ is also beset with problems of recruitment, leadership, and organization. Low morale and indiscipline are endemic, largely because of the failure of the government to provide basic necessities. Civilians are

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Mobutu with Zairian and Moroccan troops defending Shaba.

sometimes impressed into service; desertions are common. Corruption at the upper levels, often involving diversions of supplies and salaries intended for the troops, has been widespread. Last November, the FAZ put together a "special guard" to protect a shipment of United Nations trucks being sent to Shaba to be used for refugee relief. Despite the "special guard," or perhaps because of it, the trucks were stripped en route.

Some senior officers like General Babia, chief of the Zairian General Staff, would probably like to implement reforms, but it is unlikely that they will be able to resolve the most serious issues, even if Mobutu gave

them the authority to do so. Babia reportedly is particularly concerned over the extent of ethnic tensions in the FAZ and the internecine tribal maneuvering among senior Army officers.

the most serious friction occurs between officers from Mobutu's home region of Equateur and those from Haut-Zaïre. Mobutu seems to be aware of the problem and has promised to break up the clique of officers from Equateur who are attempting to undermine Babia's position. The President apparently has complete confidence in his principal officer, despite attempts by the Equateur group to impugn his loyalty.

Babia and General Singa, the commissioner in charge of Shaba Region and a longtime Mobutu loyalist, undoubtedly would play important roles in the event of a change in government. They would probably be challenged, however, by other senior officers. It is likely that a change in government or even a general breakdown of law and order in Zaïre might be accompanied by fighting between various military units, possibly along ethnic lines. At present, the Zairian military appears loyal to Mobutu, and there are no signs that senior members of the Army are plotting against the regime.



General Babia,
Chief of the General Staff.

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An Uncertain Loyalty

In his growing awareness of the possibility of civilian unrest because of economic hardships, Mobutu recently has taken some further steps to ensure the loyalty of the FAZ—especially the forces in the Kinshasa area. Last December he reinstituted the commissary program to make more and cheaper foodstuffs available to the military and their families.

The President's decision to allow the first promotions since 1977 is also related to bolstering morale. [REDACTED]

In response to reports last month of a threat by Zairian dissidents to move against Mobutu, the FAZ remains on nationwide alert. The Zairian Government and military probably still believe that some kind of dissident activity may occur during the next few weeks. The gendarmerie successfully contained short-lived student disorders on the university campus in Kinshasa last month, but the FAZ will have to be careful that an overzealous reaction to a disturbance does not exacerbate the problem. With the possible exception of those units specifically assigned to maintain order in the event of civil unrest in the Kinshasa area, however, most of the poorly trained and ill-disciplined Zairian military units might not be able—or willing—to contain a large-scale disturbance in one of Zaire's major urban areas. Indeed, the loyalty of troops whose plight is as bad as that of the civilian population is doubtful. In a case two years ago, the same gendarmerie sided with striking teachers. [REDACTED]

In the event of armed clashes with organized anti-Mobutu military forces, the loyalty of the FAZ would be even more suspect. If the force was sufficient to pose a challenge to the FAZ or to seize power, many Zairian troops would probably either desert or join forces with the opposition. Consecutive defeats at the hands of the Shaban invaders, purges by the President, and forced retirements have further undermined morale. General Babia is reported to fear that southern tribal members of the military and other disaffected elements in the Army would support a move against the government. He is also concerned that those troops who were forcibly retired might become sympathetic to the dissident cause. [REDACTED]

Mobutu has done little to reduce ethnic strains in the military, and not surprisingly, has exploited them. He has assigned officers on the basis of ethnicity and has excluded or limited the numbers of persons from Shaba, Bandundu, and East and West Kasai in certain military units. The nonrepresentative nature of the Army is largely responsible for the tensions between the military and civilians in Shaba and other areas. Mobutu believes, however, that the lack of Baluba-speaking troops in the 311th Airborne Battalion was responsible for this unit's good performance during the fighting in Shaba last May. [REDACTED]

The temporary deployment of Belgian commandos to Kitona, a town some 100 kilometers west of Kinshasa, will bolster the morale of expatriates in the Kinshasa area and may boost the confidence of the Zairian forces in the region. In the long run, however, the commandos' presence will be interpreted as confirmation of the shakiness of the Mobutu government and the ineffectiveness of his own forces. Even though the commandos plan to withdraw soon, critics of the regime can argue with some justification that Mobutu is being propped up by military forces from some 10 countries. These foreign forces are performing a variety of training and other military assistance functions. Despite the array of foreign military involvement in Zaire, the FAZ is not likely to evolve into a capable professional force in the foreseeable future, and Mobutu may not wish the Army to develop in this way. Consequently, in the short term any external threat to the country's stability will require a foreign military presence to maintain order and give the FAZ some credibility. [REDACTED]

The President has recently begun to implement reforms in the bloated military bureaucracy. Forced retirements last year reduced the military by some 8,000. Steps have recently been taken to reduce corruption in the disbursing of military pay. Mobutu and his senior commanders apparently have been able to limit the Army's mistreatment of refugees returning to Shaba. In addition, the Belgians have assumed control of some of the logistic support for certain FAZ units. Much remains to be done. Some issues, like those related to ethnic discrimination, probably will remain

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untouched. Other problems, such as the continued shortages of food supplies, are related to the sorry state of the economy and therefore beyond Mobutu's immediate ability to alter. [REDACTED]

A Little Liberalism, But . . .

In an attempt to lessen domestic tensions and respond to Western criticism, Mobutu has taken a few steps to bring about economic and political reforms, but there are clear limits to how far he will go. His brand of reform apparently allows toleration of limited open discussion of issues, but not criticism of his government. The MPR is the only political party in Zaire, and there is no room for opposition within the Party or government. Over the last year, however, Zaire's Legislative Council has become increasingly vocal in its criticism of the regime. According to the Constitution adopted last year, the Legislative Council has jurisdiction over a broad range of issues, although it remains subordinate to the President. Several members of the Council have provoked confrontations with the President to test his commitment to change. In early 1978 the Council delayed approval of Mobutu's revised constitution. Some critics have since used the legislative forum to direct veiled attacks against the regime by questioning the President's authority and impugning his integrity on several important matters ranging from ethnic discrimination in the military to misappropriations of budgetary receipts. [REDACTED]

Last November, the Council held the first public interpellations of members of the Mobutu government. Although the questioning of the Prime Minister and other ministers temporarily boosted the President's image by appearing to show him responsive to the Council, the sessions also demonstrated that many of the country's problems are directly attributable to Mobutu. At a subsequent meeting between Mobutu and 50 members of the Council, the President warned the group that "Zairian democracy" would not allow them to carry their criticism of the regime much further. Late last month, Mobutu sent the Council a letter again reminding the members that the President is above criticism. [REDACTED]

Mobutu is well aware of the dangers inherent in political liberalization and may take additional steps to intimidate the most vocal members of the Council. He is aware, however, that his reform efforts are being monitored by the West—particularly the United States—and that harsh measures against his critics on the Council would be noticed. Some members of the Council probably are encouraged by Western pressure on Mobutu to liberalize his regime. Other Zairians who have experienced Mobutu's disfavor probably believe that the President would be significantly more repressive were it not for US pressure. To his credit, Mobutu has released some political prisoners and allowed international relief agencies wide latitude in assisting returning refugees and inspecting prisons. Mobutu probably will continue to pay lipservice to reform, but will stress his concern that it take place "in a Zairian context," and will react harshly to further pressure from his Western supporters. The President no doubt believes he has gone about as far as can be expected on political reform. [REDACTED]

Mobutu's Neighbors

A breakdown of stability in Zaire could have serious repercussions in several neighboring countries. In terms of security, Angola and Zambia are Zaire's most important neighbors. Although relations with these countries have improved significantly over the last several months, Zaire will remain vulnerable for the foreseeable future to attacks by anti-Mobutu dissidents residing in Angola and Zambia. The possibility of rebel incursions into Zaire's Shaba Region will increase after the departure of the Inter-African Force later this year. Should this happen, it would create unwanted security problems for both Lusaka and Luanda on their borders with Zaire. Rwanda and Burundi are also concerned with the security situation in eastern Zaire. [REDACTED]

A new attack on Shaba and a breakdown of law and order there could trigger disorder in Kinshasa. Serious disturbances in the capital or uncontrolled student disturbances in Lubumbashi could also provide an opportunity for Zairian dissidents to initiate Shaba III or provoke disorder in other regions, such as Kivu, where the dissidents might obtain support from local sympathizers. [REDACTED]

Despite Mobutu's recent concern that mercenaries intended to lead an uprising of dissidents belonging to the Action Movement for the Resurrection of the Congo, we continue to believe that the Front for the National Liberation of the Congo (FNLC) based in Angola comprises the most serious potential threat to Mobutu. The continued improvement of Angolan-Zairian relations over the next few months should help contain the FNLC threat.

Despite the lingering mistrust between Mobutu and Neto and the antipathy between the Zairian President and Zambian President Kaunda, the three countries apparently are committed to improving cooperation on border security. In addition to the presence of anti-Mobutu dissidents in Angola and Zambia, the Zairian Government believes that rebels remain in Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

Despite reasonably good relations with several of his neighbors, Mobutu has few real friends in Africa. With the exception of Emperor Bokassa of Central African Empire, and possibly Rwanda's President Habyarimana, Mobutu is almost universally disliked and mistrusted, and could expect little in the way of sympathy or new assistance from other African leaders if he faced serious internal problems or external threats.

International Aspects Of the Zairian Economy

Zaire's economy will remain in deep trouble with almost no prospects for meaningful improvement any time soon. Foreign exchange remains tight, as one-third of the country's export receipts are diverted to service a foreign debt that exceeds \$3 billion. Other than emergency aid given after the May 1978 Shaba invasion, substantial financial support from Zaire's leading Western creditors has not been forthcoming despite President Mobutu's acceptance of a tough economic reform program last summer. The major

stumbling block to additional assistance is Zairian reluctance to control wasteful government spending.

The mines in Shaba—Zaire's most important economic asset—have performed remarkably well in view of the rebel invasions of Kolwezi and subsequent exodus of 450 expatriates last year. Recent production estimates provided by the Zairians indicate copper output last year was almost identical to the 1977 total of 435,000 tons, while cobalt production jumped to 13,200 tons, compared with 10,000 tons the year before. Mining officials have improved the cobalt recovery rate from processed copper to take advantage of currently favorable market conditions. Cobalt prices have risen from \$6.85 to \$20 a pound over the last several months. In addition to the production increases, Mobutu must also take satisfaction from the fact that Zairians are playing a major role in operating the Kolwezi mining facilities. The number of expatriates who have returned to Kolwezi has been less than expected, despite recruitment efforts in Paris, Brussels, and other European cities. The surprisingly strong recovery of Shaba's mining complex from the disruptions of the rebel incursions in 1977 and 1978 is unlikely to continue without some additional return of expatriates and a more timely flow of spare parts for the mining facilities.

Economic Reforms: A Hard Pill To Swallow

Mobutu has taken several measures to wheedle additional financial aid from the United States and other Western creditors. Since July, private banks, which finance a substantial share of Zaire's consumer imports, have been prohibited from issuing letters of credit unless they have cash on hand. At the same time, foreign exchange allocations have been reorganized. Outstanding import bills are to be paid off as quickly as possible and industrial raw materials, essential manufactures, and foodstuffs are to receive the lion's share of the remainder. Export revenues—except for copper—are to be deposited in Zairian banks rather than in overseas accounts in response to widespread adverse publicity over the disappearance of several million dollars of coffee receipts.



*Open copper mine near Kolwezi
in Zaire's Shaba Region.*

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Mobutu agreed last fall to the placement of expatriate experts in the Central Bank and promised to abide by their recommendations. The result has been a series of devaluations that has reduced the value of the currency by almost 50 percent since November; such a move would have been anathema to Mobutu in earlier years and perhaps is indicative of his desperation. The Central Bank also announced in December that those firms that have not repatriated all of their foreign exchange receipts would have their Zairian bank accounts frozen until such payments are made. So far, 50 businesses have been affected, including several owned by relatives of Mobutu. Mobutu has also dismissed several government officials on charges of corruption and released some military officers because of alleged involvement in commercial affairs. Officials released because of corruption probably will be allowed by Mobutu to ease their way back into other shady dealings.

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Kinshasa has been unwilling to keep its spending in check, as exemplified by this year's "austerity" budget, which has a government-projected deficit of \$350-400 million. The deficit will probably be in the neighborhood of \$600-700 million. A large portion of this shortfall is slated for salaries and for Mobutu's sizable slush fund, which he uses not only to pay off political and military supporters but also to advance his personal wealth through real estate and other dealings. [REDACTED]

Potential Problems

Even if the IMF plan is implemented, other problems loom on the horizon that could jeopardize the government's performance and the subsequent availability of foreign assistance. Insufficient manpower will adversely affect Kinshasa's ability to monitor the flow of Zaire's foreign exchange holdings, including a crackdown on improper pricing of exports that reduces the volume of export receipts subject to taxes and other government controls. In addition, Mobutu continues to show interest in barter deals involving copper and cobalt in exchange for imported goods. Such transactions are outside the authority of the Central Bank, which frowns on these arrangements. [REDACTED]

The sharp drop in consumer imports and concomitant surge in prices are also likely to increase popular unrest that may temper the President's enthusiasm for continuing the reform program. Neither will he want limitations placed on the availability of public funds for his personal use. The biggest question mark, however, is the status of the Shaba mines. Output this year is expected to slip to less than 400,000 tons of copper and around 10,000 tons of cobalt. It is only a matter of time before equipment begins to break down due to poor maintenance and lack of spare parts. Production may also be disrupted by fuel shortages, which would affect the movement of ore in and out of the refining centers. In addition, a major program to expand domestic production of refined copper and cobalt is threatened by Zaire's recent decision to cancel a World Bank loan, apparently because of the Bank's insistence on a strict accounting of the funds.

Finally, until President Neto can guarantee the security of the Benguela Railroad, Kinshasa will have to continue to depend on the politically unreliable Zambia-Rhodesia-South Africa rail line and the inefficient Voie Nationale, an internal land/water route, for shipping its minerals abroad. [REDACTED]

Prospects

The debilitating progression of economic reversals, internal difficulties, and repeated military challenges and dissident threats from without may combine to deal Mobutu a mortal blow. Although he has weathered crises in the past, the difficulties of the last three to four years have so eroded his power and prestige that he is unlikely to regain the authority or respect he once commanded. Mobutu is no longer the master of his house. Without continued external economic and military support his rule would disintegrate even further. [REDACTED]

The Zairian President is faced with the most serious challenge of his 14-year rule. Even if he survives, the country's economic and political decay is so pervasive and the social fabric so damaged that the situation probably cannot be completely reversed—regardless of the amount of foreign economic assistance provided to the country or external pressure on Mobutu for reform. For the short to medium term, internal conditions in Zaire will continue to deteriorate. If Mobutu does not survive politically, an even more rapid deterioration in the internal situation would probably occur. A sudden or violent change in leadership would probably result in widespread disorders before a new regime could consolidate power. Various individuals and groups would initially be concerned with sorting out new loyalties and settling old scores. Any new government would be hard pressed to unify Zaire or halt the social and economic decay. A peaceful transition of power is unlikely. [REDACTED]

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Mobutu's supporters—including the United States—are criticized from two different sides: Zairian dissidents blame the West for propping up a government that is almost universally regarded as repressive and hopelessly corrupt, and Mobutu himself criticizes the West for not supporting him completely and for encouraging his opposition. If Mobutu's position continues to deteriorate, his behavior in similar instances in the past would lead one to expect him to search for scapegoats inside Zaire and to lash out even more vociferously at his traditional foreign supporters, accusing them of "abandoning" him. Mobutu probably is already suspicious of US intentions regarding Zaire and may believe that Washington supports some of his opposition. The Zairian President could also react harshly against the United States when he learns that the meeting of Zaire's donors that he expected to be held this month was never even scheduled. [REDACTED]

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The President's practice of filling key government positions with individuals from minor ethnic groups means that there are very few individuals in positions of power who could command broad support. If Mobutu left the scene, there are several potential leaders in exile who would probably return. But it is questionable whether any could effectively bring order out of chaos. Likewise, there are no potential leaders in the country who, either individually or in concert with the exiles, pose a viable alternative to Mobutu. [REDACTED]

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Despite the lack of an apparent replacement for Mobutu, his long-term prospects for survival are worse now than at any time during his rule. In the short to medium term, Zaire's prospects for stability are dim— with or without Mobutu. Without him, the Zairian military would probably play an influential role in the establishment of a new government. With the exception of the FNLC, most of the opposition to Mobutu apparently is nonideological. Although a succeeding government might wish to be less closely tied to the West, Zaire's new leaders would probably continue to look to the country's traditional supporters as their primary allies. [REDACTED]

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